STREET SPIRIT

Justice News & Homeless Blues in the Bay Area • 1995–2021

Volume 27, No. 1 | January 2021 | A publication of Youth Spirit Artworks | Donation: $2.00

'The main thing is you're human. I've never seen money or anything change that'

Lil B talks music, humanity, and homelessness

By Alastair Boone and Elias Domingo

YOU might know him as Lil B, The BasedGod, or Brandon McCartney. Whatever the case may be, if you know him, you know that he's an East Bay legend—both a product and a purveyor of Bay Area culture. So it's no surprise that he's a fan of *Street Spirit*, which he's seen being sold on East Bay street corners for most of his life. After he dropped the song "Street Spirit Newspaper" in February 2020, we connected with him to talk about his life, career, the song, and more.

Lil B is a Bay Area rapper and public figure, born in 1989 and raised in Berkeley. He grew up in affordable housing on Hearst Avenue down by Fourth Street, a complex of townhomes now called Ocean View Gardens. "I came from zero," he said a handful of times during our two-hour long conversation at the end of December. He describes his childhood as rough, but equally, blessed. "I mean, you're born into this jungle. Folks are gettin' stepped on out here…and to raise a kid to the point you can survive and you know have a fair shot, it's a beautiful thing. You know, from a cocoon to a butterfly," he said.

One of Lil B's many trademarks is his positivity—a philosophy he describes as "imposing the positive" in his book, *Takin' Over by Imposing the Positive! My Personal Rap to You* (2009).

"What is BASED? It means just being who you are and not being afraid of that," he writes, explaining the meaning of his notorious alias, The BasedGod. "It means getting comfortable with yourself and your friends and moving on with our lives to a place where we can trust and love ourselves."

Lil B went to Albany High School, then El Cerrito High. It was during this period that he began making music, and along with artists Keith Jenkins (aka Stunnaman), Young L (Lloyd Omadhebo), and Lil Uno (Damonte Johnson), started the hip-hop group The Pack in 2004. The group made music in a home studio at Young L's house and performed at venues in San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, and beyond. They quickly started gaining traction locally, then nationally. In 2006 they released "Vans," a track they first posted on their MySpace page and was soon number five

The BasedGod continues on page 6



Photo by Logan Wallace

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

When will unhoused people get the COVID-19 vaccine? (P3)

What's that book Street Spirit vendors are selling? (P2)

Encampment porta-potties plagued with problems (P3)

What's that book Street Spirit vendors are selling?

Buy a copy of *Eastern Span* from a *Street Spirit* vendor for a sliding-scale price of $5-$20

By Alastair Boone

IN July 2019, Rick Paulas generously donated hundreds of copies of his book, *Eastern Span*, for *Street Spirit* vendors to sell along with their papers. That experiment was a success—some vendors earned hundreds of extra dollars during the months they were selling his novel. Because of this success, he donated an additional 775 books for our vendors to sell in the coming months. We sat down with Rick to talk about his debut novel, and why he wants it to be sold by our vendors. Our conversation has been edited and condensed.

Alastair Boone: I read on Twitter that having *Eastern Span* distributed by street vendors has been a dream of yours since before you finished writing the novel. Why?

Rick Paulas: Whenever I write about homeless folks or encampments, I always have a squishy bit of guilt, in that I'm literally making money off of them—just freelance rates, but still— while they're still sleeping outside. Maybe it's Catholic guilt. Anyway, this was just a way I could pay back a little.

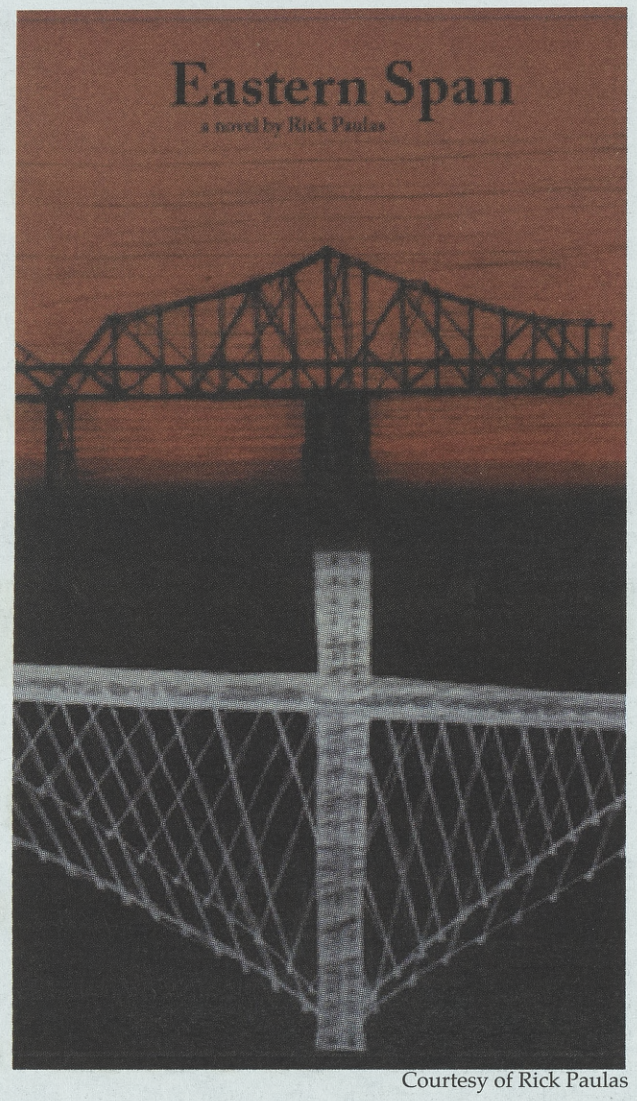
That said, I wouldn't say this is entirely altruistic. I want people I don't know to read this, and that means distribution that reaches behind my social sphere. Others use the publishing industry, but working hard to convince people they can make a buck off of you isn't super compelling to me for this project. With those two goals, this just felt logical.

Oh, also: As far as I'm concerned there is no better source of news than street papers. No economic incentive by advertisers to deal with, a completely underrepresented group of writers and journalists, and a perspective you can't get anywhere else. What else is good writing or journalism supposed to be?

AB: What inspired you to write *Eastern Span?*

RP: Mainly, two big events happened at the end of 2016: Trump and the Ghost Ship fire. They seem like distinctly sep-

Book continues on page 11



Courtesy of Rick Paulas

The cover of Paulas' novel, *Eastern Span*.

Not True

By Janny Castillo

Not true
That I am invisible.

That I disappear into thin air when you take
my blankets, my food
and everything I own.

Not true
That I don't want to come inside
If inside wanted me, I would go.

Offer me more than what I have
Offer me dignified housing
Offer me a home without an end date
A home that does not take every dollar I make
And I would go

Not true
That I want to live in squalor.
That I want to live without water or a bathroom
Without hot food, without safety
In fear and uncertainty

Not true
That I steal,
That I steal profits from businesses
and property values from owners

Not true
That I want charity
more than the right to live free
From harassment, from judgement
From shame

What's true
Is that some cannot see me
As their neighbor, their friend,
Valuable, capable, worthy
Of existing by them.

More true
Is that some, maybe you
cannot see me at all.

East Bay Advisory

FENTANYL WARNING



Increase in Fentanyl being found in Stimulants in East Bay

Due to a recent uptick in fentanyl use and fentanyl in stimulants, we are seeing more instances of folks overdosing who are using drugs.

2020 has hit our community hard, especially our unhoused brothers and sisters and folks who use drugs. In the recent months, we have seen an uptick in fentanyl being found in stimulants. This means folks who are using stimulants OR opioids are all at risk of overdose. Please see the signs and symptoms below for an opioid overdose:



For access to Fentanyl Test Strips and Narcan: Please contact Michaella Jones with HEPPAC at 510-394-2552 or mjones@casasegura.org

Test Your Supply
Best way to keep yourself safe is by testing your supply.



ALWAYS Have Narcan Handy
Make sure when you use, someone knows where the Narcan is and how to use it.



Don't Use Alone!
If you can, always try and use with someone. If you are using together, take turns! Always start low and go slow.

When will unhoused people get the COVID-19 vaccine?

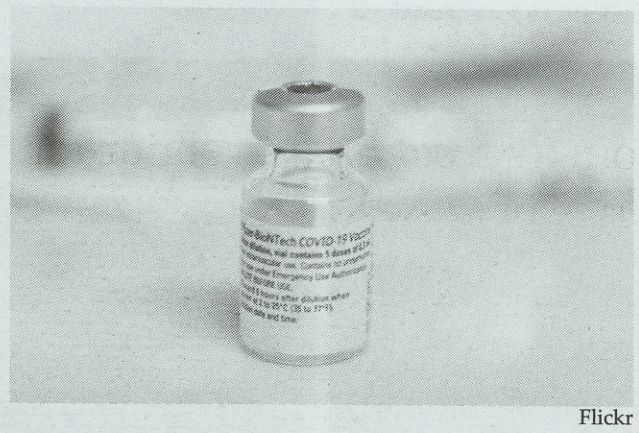
By Alastair Boone

As Bay Area healthcare workers started receiving the coronavirus vaccine at the end of December, unhoused people and their advocates are wondering when the vaccine will become available to the homeless community. While people in high risk groups are said to be next in line, at the time of publication on January 5, the question of who will be prioritized and when is still the subject of debate amongst state and local health officials.

Individuals who work directly with those experiencing homelessness in the East Bay have started to receive the vaccine as well. County officials say that people who live on the street and in shelters will follow close behind—although when, exactly, the vaccine will hit the streets has yet to be determined.

Unhoused people fall into the "high risk" category for a number of reasons: They often live with chronic illness or in congregate settings, both of which make one more susceptible to the deadly virus. According to the phased approach framework from the National Academy of Medicine, residents and staff at homeless shelters as well as prisons and jails should be vaccinated in phase two, after high-risk health workers and older adults living in congregate or overcrowded settings.

Ultimately, the decision about who to vaccinate and when will happen at the local level.



Flickr

A vile of COVID vaccine ready for distribution.

Nationally, unhoused people aren't slated into any of the proposed vaccine distribution phases by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Instead, the ACIP leaves room for individual states to define the specific members of the priority groups.

In Boston, people experiencing homelessness started receiving the vaccine at the end of December. 100 doses of the Moderna vaccine specifically for the homeless community were scheduled to arrive at the end of the month, Dr. Jim O'Connell, president of Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, which will be administering the shots, told radio station *WBUR*.

"We've had good luck at getting homeless people living in the shelters to trust us enough to get the vaccine. But that's always been with a single dose," O'Connell said, "The challenge for us now, I think, is going to be ... once they've had the first shot, make sure that 28 days later or thereabouts, we can find them and that they're still willing to have a second shot."

O'Connell's team will prioritize unhoused people with underlying health conditions first, as well as those living at the most crowded shelters.

"Everybody has a different idea about what essential means... so you're going to see a lot of fights about that," Dr. John Swartzberg, a clinical professor emeritus of infectious diseases and vaccinology at the UC Berkeley-UCSF Joint Medical Program, told The Mercury News.

According to data from the National Academy for State Health Policy, as of December 20, Massachusetts and Texas were the only states to designate homeless shelters as part of phase 1A of their vaccination plan. The following states plan to distribute COVID-19 vaccines to homeless shelters during the next phase, 1B: Arizona, Washington D.C., Maine, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Vermont.

Alastair Boone is the Editor in Chief of Street Spirit.

East Bay porta-potties plagued by problems, some better than others

By Nick Burt

Amanda Nguyen, an unhoused resident of the encampment at High Street and Alameda Street in East Oakland, has not seen a United Service Company employee clean any of the porta-potties in the camp for the past four months.

"There are human feces smeared across the wall in the far-right bathroom," Nguyen said. She pointed to another porta-potty where excrement piled up to the toilet seat.

Nguyen has been regularly employed by the Baines Security Company, a group hired by residents to take care of security for the High Street camp. In that time, records within the porta-potties indicate that United Services has serviced the facilities once every two days.

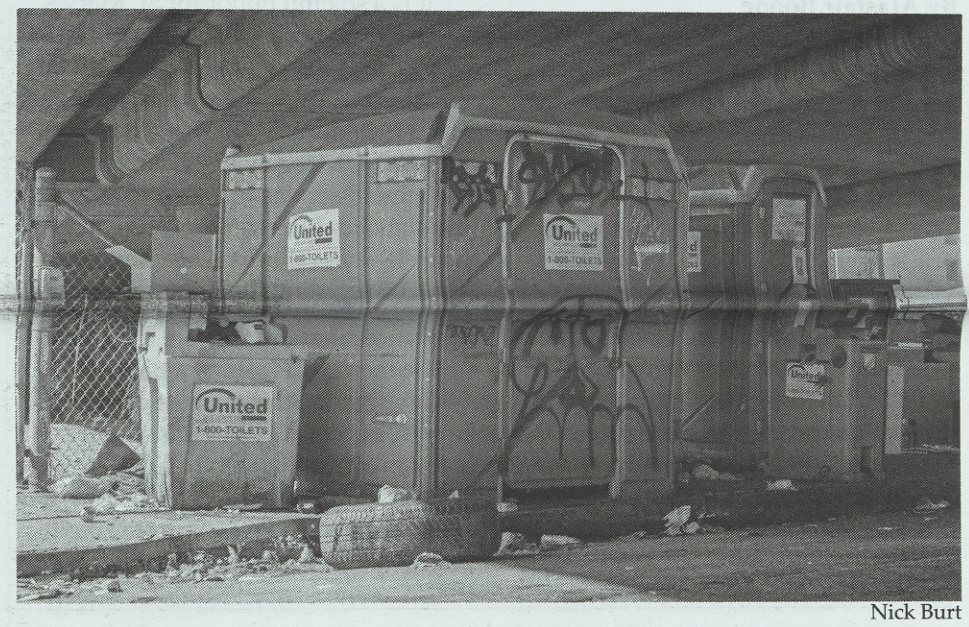
"They have not come to clean the porta-potties once. They come here seldomly and when they do, they mark the cleaning sheet and leave," Nguyen remarked from the inside of her car. "They're scared to come in here and I can't blame them. The porta-potty in the back is used by someone who has COVID-19."

Prior to March 2020 and the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, there were 38 locations at which the City of Oakland had placed two or more porta-potties. Since then, the city has increased the number to 46 with each site including a hand-washing station.

There are at least 11 other porta-potties in Oakland that are paid for by community members. The Village in Oakland—a non-profit Oakland advocacy group—is currently paying for 10 portable toilets in nine different encampments. This is common in cities across the Bay Area—where there is a gap in sanitation services, non-profits and individuals step in to fill the gap.

Between December 8 and 11, *Street Spirit* visited all 46 porta-potty sites paid for by the City and found 30 were clean and stocked with toilet paper. 16 were found without toilet paper and filled with excrement. However, all 46 sites have recorded ledgers that state they are serviced every two days with toilet paper and hand sanitizer being replenished. But some may go for weeks without a standard cleaning.

The cities of Berkeley and Oakland both work directly with United Site Services, the leading provider of porta-potty rentals in the United States according to their website. However, servicing by United workers is not always reliable.



Nick Burt

A pair of porta-potties under an overpass in Oakland.

"The facilities are extremely difficult to manage," said an anonymous source at the City of Oakland. "There seems to always be issues with the vendor. When the wildfires up North happened in August and September, four drivers had to stop servicing their routes."

In addition to inconsistent servicing, workers are not forced to clean facilities if the porta-potty is found breaking their guidelines. This could mean that there are objects found in the toilet, the floor, or urinal other than excrement. And since workers are not required to inform local users as to why the facility was not serviced, weeks can then go by with no access.

Oakland's Department of Health and Human Services has two paid employees who oversee the deployment of sanitation stations and the cleanliness of each site. Before November 2020, only one city worker was in charge of overseeing the deployment and upkeep of every site. That worker was not always able to visit every site and check to make sure United Services was fulfilling their contract due to other city obligations, says a staff worker at the Human Services Department.

***Porta-potties** continues on page 11*

STREET SPIRIT

Justice News & Homeless Blues in the Bay Area

A publication of Youth Spirit Artworks

JC Orton
Vendor Coordinator

Alastair Boone
Editor in Chief

Inti Gonzalez
YSA Street Spirit Leader

Do you have a tip, or feedback about the paper? Please email us at streetspiritnews@gmail.com

East Bay memorials honor lives lost on the street





Thomas Brouns

Left: boona cheema sits in front of an altar for the lives lost on the street. Right: Russell Bates and Lisa Teague join the zoom memorial from People's Park.

By Alastair Boone

DECEMBER brought two East Bay memorials for people who have lived and died on the street. Both services were well attended by community activists, East Bay residents, advocates, and elected officials, who gathered to sing, pray, and celebrate the lives of individuals who passed in the last year as well as those who died in anonymity. Both memorials also served as a call to action: the hosts frequently called upon the attendees to put pressure on the mayor and city council to meet the basic needs of unhoused people. The services took place over zoom rather than in person due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"It is a solemn honor for St. Mary's Center to co-host the annual memorial service for those who lived and died on our streets," said Janny Castillo, Director of Community Outreach and Services at St. Mary's Center, which hosts the annual service in Oakland. "I hear the statistics like everyone else, that homelessness shortens life, and takes lives, but reading the names aloud of those that have passed makes the consequences that much more real."

The memorials struck a particularly somber tone this year, as death in homeless communities has skyrocketed since last January. In five Bay Area counties, there were 560 known homeless deaths in 2020, according to *The Mercury News*—but experts caution that the actual number is likely much higher. Only four of these deaths were due to confirmed coronavirus cases. In Alameda County, death in unhoused communities increased 40 percent during the first nine months of 2020 compared to the same period last year. In San Francisco, it rose a staggering 123 percent. Experts say this is due to overdose, old age, services becoming harder to access due to COVID-19, and the general increase of the homeless population.

The St. Mary's Center memorial took place on December 10. On December 12, there was a service in Berkeley as well, broadcast out of People's Park and the South Berkeley Here/There encampment.

The Berkeley memorial was hosted by the newly configured Berkeley Community Safety Coalition (BCSC)—an umbrella group comprised of dozens of longtime homeless activists and advocacy organizations such as Friends of Adeline, First They Came for the Homeless, Berkeley Copwatch, the Berkeley Outreach Coalition, People's Park Committee and Where Do We Go, Berkeley?, and others.

"We are here to stay. We are here to keep speaking truth to power in ways that they will have no choice but to listen," said boona cheema, who sits on the steering committee for the BCSC and is the former director of Building

***Memorial** continues on page 10*

My first holiday free, alone, and away from my prison family

FIRST-PERSON

By Jonathan Chiu

WHEN you think of the holidays in a prison, you might imagine it's like a scene out of "Orange is the New Black" or some B-grade prison movie. That's probably a close approximation.

For many, Christmas usually means getting an extra visiting day if you have a family that is willing to make the trek just to spend a few hours inside a prison with you in a drab visiting room with little cheer except a generic Christmas tree in a corner.

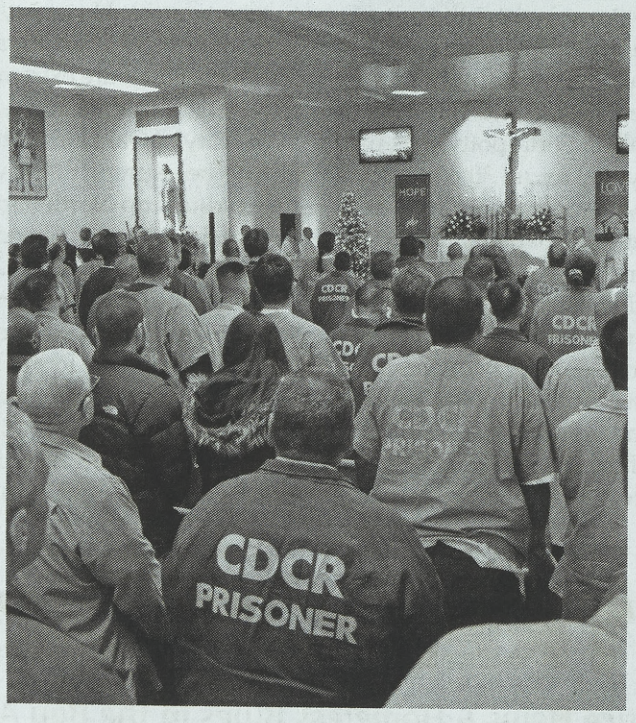
For good and bad reasons, I never was part of that.

I grew up in a Chinese household. We weren't one of those families who tried to assimilate by putting up holiday lights and a Christmas tree with presents underneath. We were one of those families that turned off the lights in the house, so the carolers don't come by. As a kid, the holidays meant one thing: a trip to Vegas.

My family never cooked turkey or ham nor did I get presents. We just loaded up the car and drove four hours to Vegas.

I never had my family come see me during the holidays, and I'm glad that they never had to get searched by officers on Christmas Day. It would have been hard to say good-bye and watch them go back to their lives while they left me to ingest what passed as a holiday meal in Chow Hall.

But people adapt to our environments, and that's especially true when you're incarcerated. We create our own holiday traditions.



Eddie Herena

Christmas Eve mass at the San Quentin chapel.

At San Quentin there were open mics with the college program, and volunteers from the community would come inside and sing Christmas carols in the buildings. We also enjoyed spreads with the homies, where we'd bond over homemade burritos, rice bowls and desserts. Many of us would save up from our jobs and buy some extra food. Those with families, who bought them lots of snacks during visitation, passed them out to the men who weren't as fortunate.

Holidays. Family. Food. Bonding. Couldn't get better than that, right?

The holiday meal they will get this year is anyone's guess. In the past, we were usually served a somewhat warm meal with a real slice of turkey and the fixings, but with a lockdown in place, every meal has been served two hours too late and colder than the San Francisco fog.

This year, I'm spending my first Christmas in 16 years as a free man, but because of the pandemic, I am again separated from my family. I feel the same loneliness I felt inside, but it's by choice.

I should feel happy being out of prison, but I miss the people there who had been my family all these years. I miss our prison traditions, and it's tough knowing that my family in San Quentin is without their families too. They can't even go outside to see the night sky and take a breath of fresh air.

I still have my formerly incarcerated family out here, but we have yet to create a tradition during pandemic times. Is there a custom for someone who spent 16 years in prison coming back to a different world order? Zoom carols perhaps? Text with the fam? Facetime with my partner? Technology—it lets us stay in touch yet simultaneously makes us feel so alone.

***Holiday** continues on page 12*



Alastair Boone

Jones smiles for a photo outside Starbucks in Jackson Square in Hayward.

Tyrone Jones: Husband, landscaper, adventurer

By Noah Baustin

To hear Wilford Tyrone Jones tell it, Alton, Illinois was a magical place to grow up.

Overlooking downtown is a statue of Robert Wadlow, a hometown hero who grew to become the tallest man in the world. Then there were legends of the Piasa Bird, a dragon that lived in the caves cut into the cliffs over the banks of the Mississippi River. Plus the Blue Pool, a flooded mining shaft that Jones heard was bottomless.

"It would suck you in if you got too close," Jones, who's 63 and goes by Tyrone, explained with a smile during a recent conversation with *Street Spirit*.

These days, you might bump into Jones selling papers by the corner of Shattuck Avenue and Vine Street. But Berkeley feels like a far cry from Jones's childhood in a small community north of St. Louis, Missouri.

"We were adventurous in my hometown," Jones said. "We grew up with the woods and wildlife."

As a kid, Jones's mother traveled a lot, so his grandmother Melissa White raised him and his seven siblings.

"She was a Cherokee Indian and we called her nanny," Jones explained.

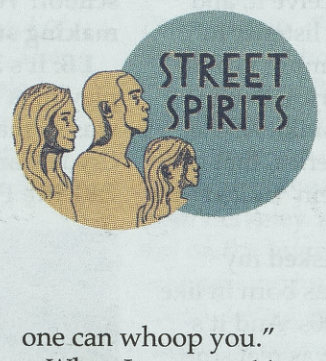
He describes his grandmother as an angel who always knew how to make their family feel good.

"We didn't have a lot but we thought we grew up rich, because we lived rich," Jones said. "I don't know how she did it."

Alton was a tight-knit community where all the adults took care of each other's kids.

"If Ms. Rebecca caught you over there shooting dice on the curb, momma didn't have to see you," Jones said.

"Everyone in the town is your momma, everyone can whoop you."



When Jones was 14 years old, he moved with his mother to San Bernardino, CA, east of Los Angeles. As luck would have it, someone left a set of conga drums in his new house.

"I started beating on them all the time," he said.

Before long, Jones had grown into a talented percussionist. He was just a teenager but a group of older musicians welcomed him into their band called Revolution of Change.

"They would ask my mom if I could come with them to shows on the weekend," Jones said.

The group played across Los Angeles, from nightclubs to high school auditoriums.

Jones remembered one gig in Hollywood where the group rocked the house with a rendition of "I'll Take You There" by The Staple Singers.

"I played so hard my fingers were bleeding," he said. By the time the show was over, "there was blood all over the congas."

When he was 19, Jones moved with his family back to Alton, Illinois, where he met a young woman named Cathrine Harris. A year later, the pair had a son who they named Najai. Then shortly later, a daughter named Toya.

Jones was happy to be a father. But in his early 20s, Jones decided to move back to California with his mother. Cathrine and the kids stayed in Alton. From there on, Jones entered into a travelling phase that would last decades, moving from place to place, never putting down roots for too long.

"I kind of drifted," he said. He inherited that wandering spirit from his mom. "She taught us to go to different places and try to live, don't stay in one spot, go branch out."

He popped around the country, living at different times in San Bernardino, California, Indianapolis, Indiana, and Racine, Wisconsin. Sometimes he'd stay years, other times just months.

Although Jones has lived out of his car, stayed in shelters, and participated in hous-

Street Spirits *continues on page 8*

One of many

By Douglas Levon Dawkins

I recycle plastic
rummage through trash,

Live by the
freeway underpass,

I wear a smile
but really it's just a mask,

How do I sleep
or eat you ask,

I figured
you'd misunderstand,

Think I'm a lazy
or a foolish man,

Without health insurance
or a retirement plan,

Living in a house
of cardboard built on sand,

Forever holding
out my hand,

You judge my clothing
prejudge my mind,

But you never
read my sign,

Walk by me and frown
every single time,

If for each spite
I only had a dime,

It should be a crime
poverty is an age-old color line,

You cringe openly
without hesitation,

I'm cut twice
by your discrimination

I bear the lashes
of societal-alienation,

I hurt, deep in my soul
but I keep hopin',

That our communities
as a whole would be woken,

Please hear
what can't be spoken,

I feel like a cast-away
I'm faithful but broken,

The poor found
lost in the open,

I'm optimistic
despite my mood,

Can I wash your
windows
(translation)
I will work for food,

I fish off the pier
my valuables in a shoe
box,

I don't steal,
and I don't smoke rocks,

Experience some
setbacks
suffered some
hard-knocks,

Two tours in Iraq,
nightmares that won't stop,

I have P.T.S.D.
and other psychological knots,

Emotions which run
cold then hot,

Escaped my batterer,
ran for blocks,

With my purse, medication,
and the clothes on my back

When your spouse threatens
to kill you, take it as a fact,

I'm not for sale
I have no needle tracks,

My hunger not a scheme,
My homelessness not an act,

You wonder if I'll
spend your 50 cents on crack,

I'd rather buy
a Cup-O-Noodle in fact,

Spiritually I feel abandoned
mentally I feel under attack,

There are gray areas
indeed lines get blurry,

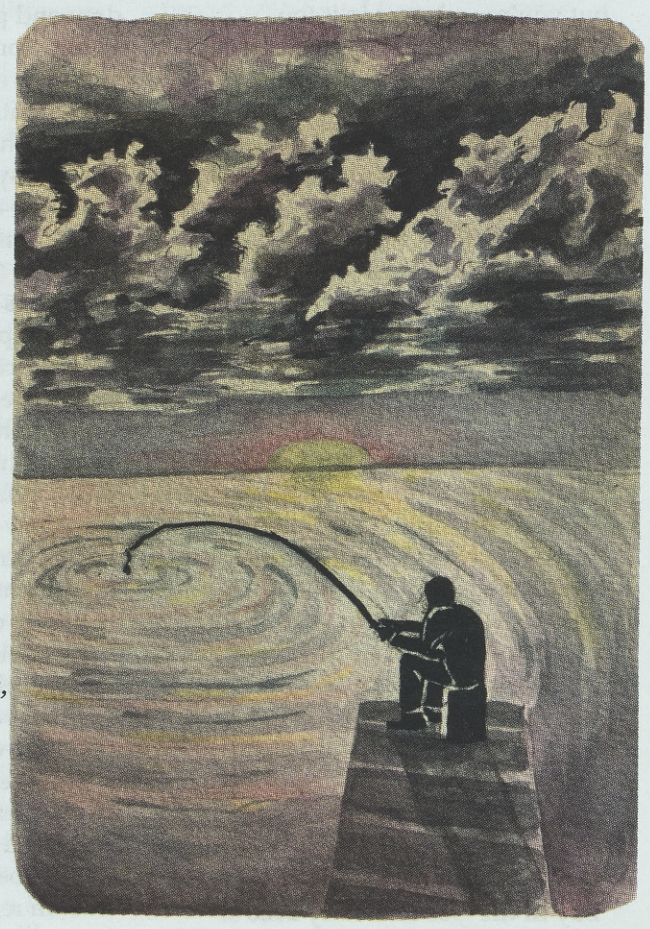
You give suspiciously
with regret and worry,

Avert your eyes
and walk by in a hurry,

Before you judge me
please consider my story,

I'd tell it for a penny,
I am one of many.

This poem is part of a collection called EXHIBIT-A: HOMELESSNESS. Douglas Levon Dawkins aka Truth N. Poetry is a poet and writer born and raised in the Bay Area. Prior to his incarceration, he was homeless, and says poetry and art have helped him in his lifelong battle with depression. He is currently incarcerated in California.



Simone Rotman

In Dialogue with The BasedGod: Rapp

The BasedGod from page 1

on Rolling Stone's 100 best songs of the year.

After his days in The Pack, Lil B's solo rap career took off. He quickly developed a cult following—a low hum of fame on the national scene, but around the Bay, his celebrity reached a fever pitch. He is a prolific music-maker: At the age of 22 he claimed to have released 2,000 songs—a believable feat if you pay attention to his catalogue of music. He often releases huge volumes of music online for free. In 2020 he released at



least 438 songs across five albums. He has never signed with a major label or gone out of his way to capitalize on his fame—intentionally, it seems, staying on the fringe of the mainstream. Instead, he has defined his own brand, keeping fans close and wearing his heart on his sleeve.

"Rap and life ain't about guns or knives or WEAK shit like that anymore," he wrote in his book. It's about bein' tough enough to be BASED and imposing the POSITIVE."

In turn, the media has never quite known what to make of him. In 2015, he appeared on ESPN's SportsNation wearing a lacy dress, dangly earrings, and a big floppy hat. There are countless photos on his instagram page of fans with the words "I <3 Lil B" written on their feet. In 2012, *The New Yorker* called him "the strangest rapper alive." All of this gives him an aura of authenticity that is rare—particularly for someone who has been famous since his teens.

It is for this reason that, to his fans, he feels elemental to the culture of the Bay Area. Despite all his successes he has always stayed close to the people. "That's kinda the theme of my lifestyle," he told me. "Yeah I'm in a club but you're welcome in it too."

The people, what he describes as the street culture, is what informs his music: Whether that be Telegraph Avenue, the Ashby Flea Market, or the vendors selling *Street Spirit*. In fact, he even plans to sell this issue of *Street Spirit* himself alongside our regular newspaper vendors.

"*Street Spirit* to me is Berkeley. It's Telegraph. It's Ashby. It's dignity. It's promotion and marketing with love. It's people getting out there and word of mouth," he said.

We connected with Lil B at the end of December. During our phone call, he walked and biked around the East Bay while we talked about homelessness, growing up in the Bay Area, the fight for a better future, and more. Our conversation has been edited and condensed for length and clarity.

***

Alastair Boone: Let's start from the beginning. Can you paint a picture of what life was like growing up in the Bay in the '90s and early 2000's?

Lil B: You know for me, it was amazing, unique, rough. I think every kid, no matter the amount your parents got in the bank or what you got or what you don't have, I think it's rough for all kids. You gotta compare kids and grownups to baby animals. I mean, you're born into this jungle. Folks are gettin' stepped on out here… and to raise a kid to the point you can survive and you know have a fair shot, it's a beautiful thing. You know, from a cocoon to a butterfly.

Growing up, [born in] '89, you know it like growing up in a real blessed time. The technology boom, stuff popping up out of nowhere like the internet... You know, Berkeley, out of anywhere, that's where it's possible. All the thinkers in Berkeley. That's why I love being from Berkeley and representing Berkeley cuz it's like… It's consistent thinkers. The thinkers rule out Berkeley. You could look however you want to look but it's like what are you offering from the mind? People are really just unique and doing their thing and I love it. And that's why the music comes how it does cuz it's like, I'm just really givin' the people how I feel.

And for me too, growing up low-income in Berkeley was just unique. Where I was stayin' is now probably worth millions or whatever but it was low-income.

There's a lot of different ways to live life. A lot of people born into a lot of situations. Some people born in foster care, being adopted. Some people born with things passed down to 'em, whether it might be real estate or family business. Some people born *from zero. Nothing. Have to figure it* out. Some people are born and die. There's so many situations within this beautiful life...it's like all I can do is be happy for today and not look at anything like I'm better or I'm worse…or this person's better or they're worse… people are just people, they got where they got. The main thing is you're human. I never seen money or anything change that.

I'm blessed to be now, be alive here, and just experience what I have experienced in my life. I'm happy about it…just how I feel about making it from a kid because that's the roughest. This is not easy. You definitely have to protect the children, respect the children and protect them. You really gotta pray for 'em, cuz they have to have will to live. They gotta wanna live and the parents and the community has to work on having the foundation and support system and a place that they can grow and live.

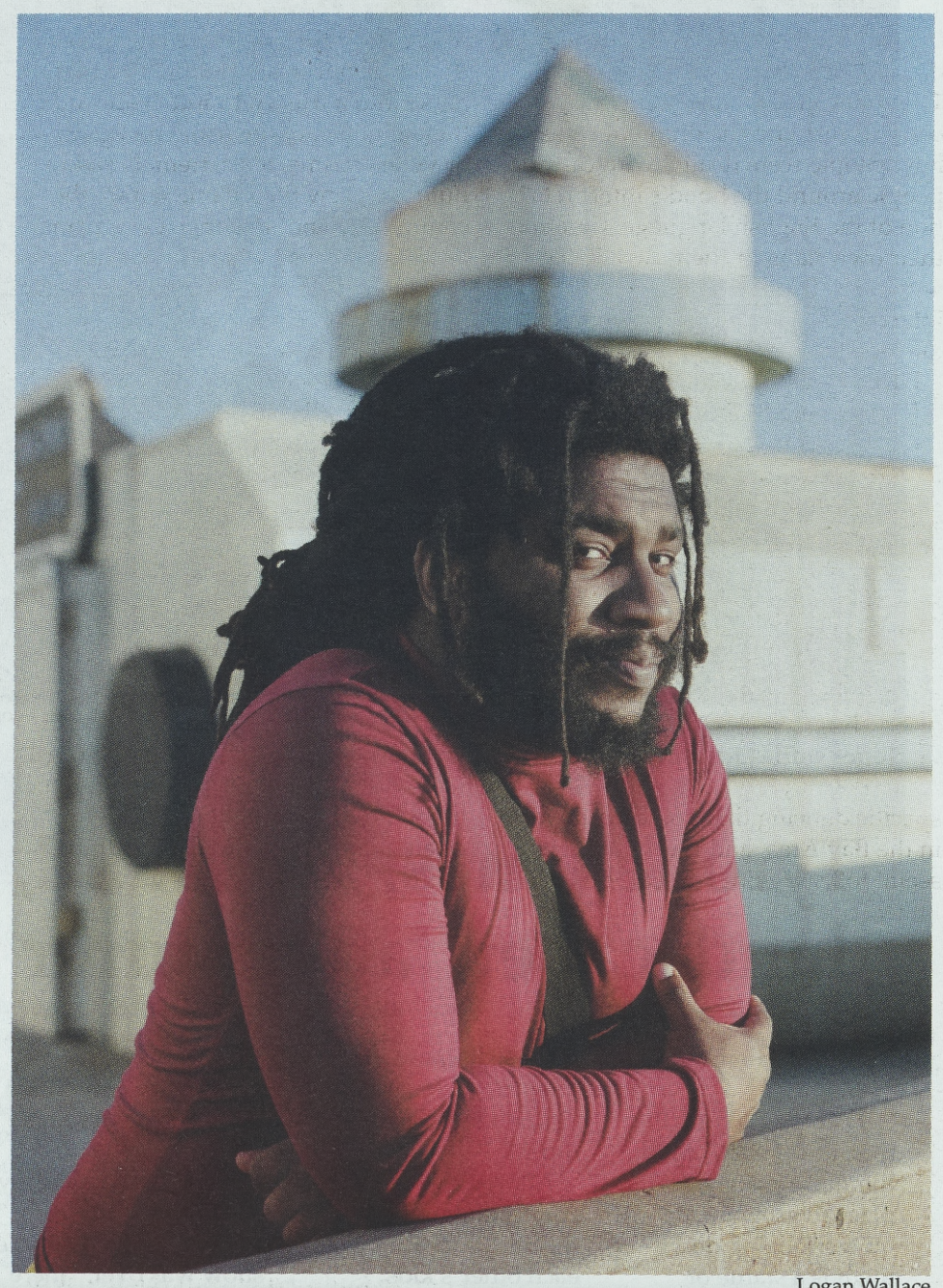
AB: Berkeley has changed so much since the '90s. Between 1990 and 2010 there was a 50 percent decline in the Black population in Berkeley. Have you noticed a big change in Berkeley from when you grew up?

LB: Nah for me, beside the white people, there's always been other races, whatever that means. Like I said I was low-income but I was stayin' on Fourth Street. I was lucky enough, the apartment I was staying in was literally on top of commercial real estate. So stuff's going on downstairs, shops are being built. Seein' Fourth Street being built, it was a beautiful community of people. I was embraced, growing up. I didn't feel Black as a kid until I got older, then I realized what bein' Black was. And not even being Black, just kind of being the situation I was born into. In reality, if you Black you Black in America. And that means whatever you want it to mean. And that goes for the person that's receiving the information and the person that's sayin' the information. Cuz you know if you say "ay, you Black in America," that matters to how you perceive it, and that's something for the listener to think about. Cuz in my mind I could be like ay, Black in America, that's amazing. Which I do [think]. At the same time, Black in America, that can mean Jim Crow laws. Bein' locked out of wealth.

I started from zero. I asked my grandma, her mother was born in like 1913, damn near the 1800s. And it's rough back then, there was real stuff going on. I think my grandma, she was really doing that labor, you know what I mean. That's not that long ago. My grandma and her mother really came from the struggle, so it's like, her kids gonna come up in struggle, and then that gave me a way to kind of make it and do my best. But you know, I was still coming from zero. You know it's like…why am I not in Rockridge? Why don't my family members got a spot in Rockridge? Why am I not in Montclair? Why wasn't I born into Montclair? Why do I have to work to get there? [But] that comes to what's going on in America, what happened in the past.

It ain't like [Black] people just comin' out booty ghetto, comin out the coochie sayin' cuss words and saggin'. It's like, we was locked out. The government and everybody, they played us. They played they people, they played the people that built America. But I get it, why would you want to help the people that you played.

I'm not mad about nobody, I'm happy. It's like shit, you know, I'm startin' from where I'm startin' from and I'm leaving something to somebody.

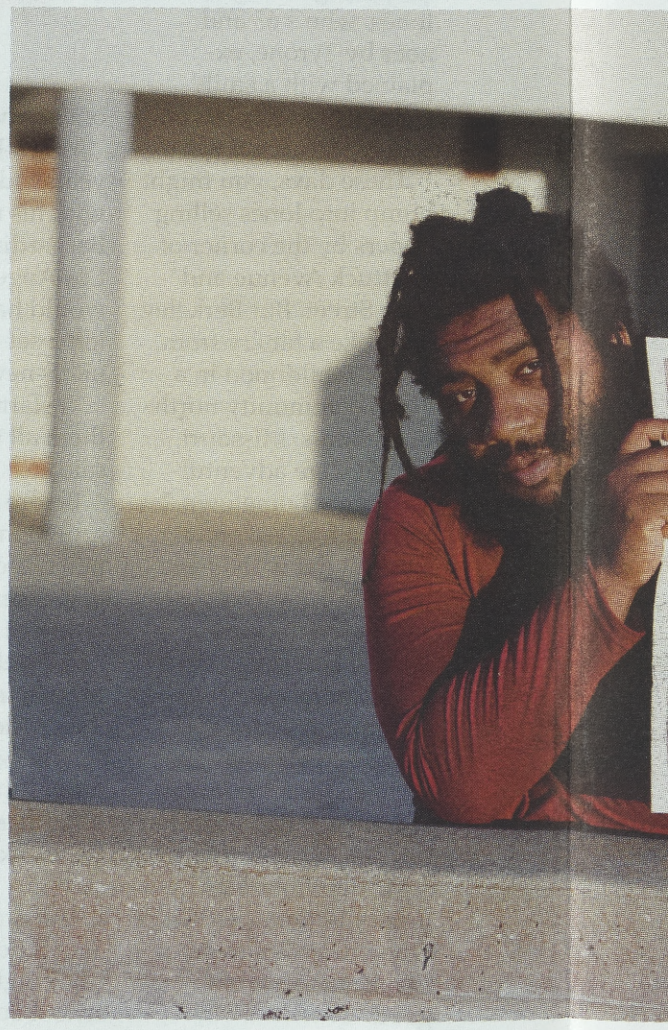


Logan Wallace

Lil B poses for a photo outside the Cliff House in San Francisco.

AB: I want to know about your high school experience, because that's when you started making music. What was the scene around the East Bay like when you were in high school? What was it that led you to making such resonant music?

LB: It's amazing times, the radio playing a lot of Bay Area artists, there was so many. Hearing The Team, Clyde Carson, Kaz Kyzah, Too Short, E40, Mr. Fab, Nump, Turf Talk, Eddie



Lil B holds up a copy of Street Spirit.

Rapper, public figure, East Bay staple

Projex, Luniz, there was so much goin' on…which was fueled by the streets. The street culture. Just seein' the colorful cars and the different styles of how people were dealin' with cars, or people around the hood's interpretation of the English language. Creating their own slang or their own dialect within the English language was very interesting to me. And you know just the look, how people looked.

I always say the day that changed my life, where I said I wanted to be in rap or come up from the streets and have a role within the streets within music, [was when] I went to a rap dance in South Berkeley. This was like middle school, I went to Longfellow Middle School. They was playin' hip-hop and I walk in and it was all dark and I was just seein' a bunch of kids my age dancing. Girls, dudes, and it just really looked like a movie. Strobe lights goin' on, green strobe lights. All dark. And it was very Bay Area specific dancing that you can only find in the Bay Area, and I went in there seein' folks sagging, dreadlocks, you know...peacoats and pants backwards, turned inside out, that represents something. People wearing Gap hoodies, all the different type of shoes, and it was just like man...this is what I'm tryin' to do. It was so, so theatrical. That's why I be explaining it through my art and through my production and my visuals because it's like I really seen everything differently. I really seen the beauty in everything and really… it was just a game changer for me from then and there.

AB: So you wanted to be part of it, making music.

LB: Got to. Got to. First it was about getting a name locally. It wasn't even about music first. I wanted a name locally. Because that's how it starts, the foundation. That's why you see a lot of young people getting in trouble for different things, because a lot of people are looking for a name. That's why I understand where people are coming from, young or sometimes older. If you look at it as entrepreneurship, because you have to make a name for your business, right? So it's just about who's gonna turn that name into a trusted brand. Some kids, they might be doing some robberies or violent crime, it's extremely sad. But they grow their name within the community and now they got a name and it's like, well what are you going to do with it? Some people don't make it. Some go to prison, they lose they life. Some people take it to the next level and...they put everything behind them. That's the street. It's always going to be different for everybody.

And there's a different type of streets for Black people, right. The Black streets is like underground railroad, oppression. That's the real streets. But then there's other race's streets—once again, whatever race is, because we're all one people. You could be white in the streets. White folks' streets. But at the end of the day you still white in America, so it's like folks will understand you more even if you poor. You might just need to clean up, put on a suit or something, figure it out. Folks will want to look at you because you white in America and you got that lineage and history.

But comin' from the bottom, the Black underground, it's like prison waiting for you right there. To me, when they say go back to Africa, that's prison. Nobody going back to Africa, I'm from America. That's why there are so many prisons. Who are prisons for?

AB: It seems like you've known about *Street Spirit* for a minute. I want to know what your relationship with the paper is like. What does the paper represent to you?

LB: *Street Spirit* to me is Berkeley. It's Telegraph. It's Ashby. It's dignity. It's promotion and marketing with love. It's people getting out there and word of mouth. That's where I found out about *Street Spirit*, word of mouth. People sayin', "check this out, it's *Street Spirit*," holding the paper.

Speaking of Brandon McCartney—not Lil B, not The BasedGod, because this before rap—when I was seeing *Street Spirit* I was just a random kid from Berkeley. A random spec of dot on the huge earth from Berkeley, making sure just that I'm not forgotten about. Trying to figure out if I scream "help," people will care. I'm making sure I'm just not thrown away. From then until now, *Street Spirit*'s been there. When I hit the streets…people representing. It was a beautiful thing to see the people representing a publication.

When I say the people I don't want people to assume I'm just talking about Black people. And when I say the streets, I'm not just talking about Black people. I'm talking about all people. It's who you guys think. It's who you think is on the streets and the people. We are the people. All y'all. Everybody the people.

So when I seen the people with this [newspaper] and representing it… it's like, *Street Spirit* is just as much as Starbucks or Peet's Coffee is to Berkeley to me. Peet's Coffee, Starbucks, Hear Music, *Street Spirit*, Café Au Coquelet, the Berkeley Theater, Cal Berkeley, the Ashby Flea Market, *Street Spirit*, it's all that. All that's important...That's real Berkeley.

AB: How did you decide to make a song called "Street Spirit Newspaper"?

LB: Really just came from the heart. I'm documenting...When I create sounds, I sequence music how I do... it's just done to bring people closer to who I am and closer to the truth and what's goin' on...just making sure that they hear me.

With the music I'm making, my intent is love, bringing people together, history. Pushing the culture forward. Experimenting with music, being creative, you know, really trying to get to that point where you can taste sound. You know what I'm sayin', that's where I'm trying to get to, where you can taste it. I'm working with folks within the technology field…I'm trying to push stuff forward. I want to eat it. I want to eat what I'm listening to.

"Street Spirit Newspaper" the song had to come out in 2020 over The BasedGod production. It couldn't have been over somebody else's beat, it had to be from The BasedGod because that's authentic. You guys had to hear the funk and my interpretation of what I see and it's coming out of my body which is transferred to the sound. I worked hard to engineer that sound and to bring it to the people so it's like with that song I'm bringin folks closer to Lil B. And some of this stuff is even close to Brandon McCartney.

Every sound, that's the art of bringing y'all closer to me. But it really comes from the struggle, like, underground railroad, not far removed from it. Felt like a generation or two.

Like [I've] said this is just the start. I'm working on learning jazz piano so if there's any readers that teach jazz piano or teach funk piano or teach different instruments that wanna help me out, hit me up, @lilbthebasedgod hit me up on Twitter, send me a DM, Instagram, @lilbisgod, pby email], diorpaint@gmail.com, you know. If you local and you love music, let me know. Let's work.

AB: How do your philosophies—the ones you wrote about in your book—play into modern social justice movements? What does a brighter future look like to you?

LB: We need some people that's up, right, people that's in the position, like a Buffy Wicks that's elected. Shout out to Buffy Wicks, I sent her some information cuz I voted for her so I'm like, alright well now what can you do for Black people specifically.

Whatever I can do to support Black…I support with my music, I support with how I feel, not judging people like, really loving people like, and that's what I'm saying. I'm not even helping enough how I want to help. I need to help more people. It's more that I need to do. There's more things I need to do to show how I really love people. I need to go to plant trees in the wealthiest communities, in the middle-class communities. I want to help the kids that was born into money. I want to be there for them. I want to be there for the middle class. I want to be there for the poor. Because I'm here for the people. I'm not excluding people because there's a lot of people that they feel excluded. They be like "how are they getting benefits, why is there this Black student union, where's my union," or whatever. And it's like no, I ain't forgot you. Lil B, The BasedGod, Brandon McCartney, I haven't forgot y'all. I'm not one of them folks that forgot anybody. So I'm not forgetting folks.

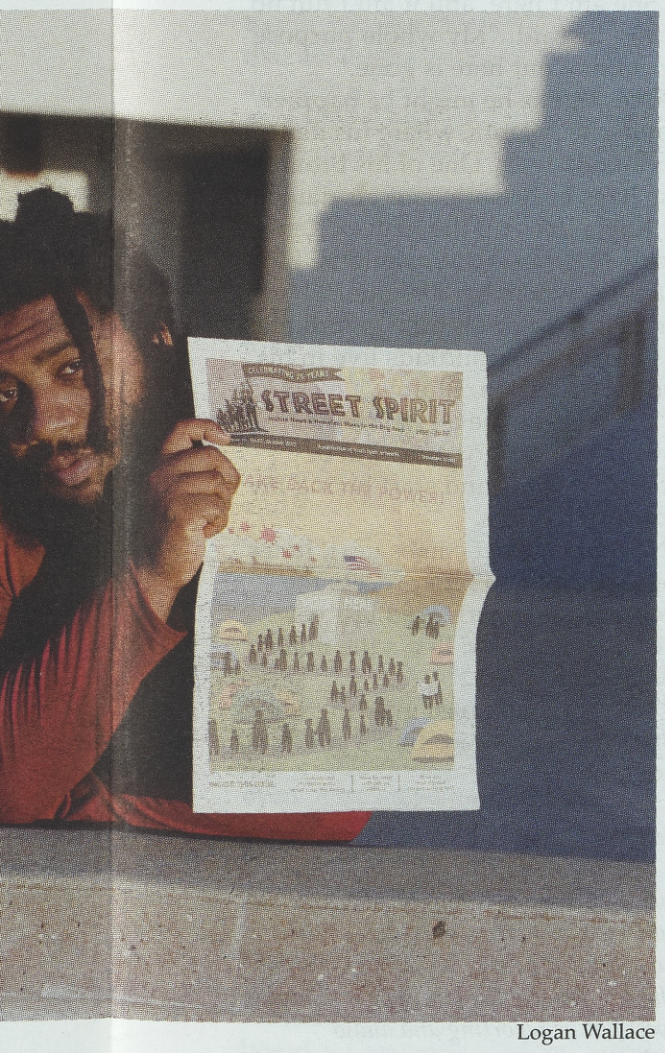
Can't forget about nobody. Can't forget about…like…everybody's welcome. And that's kinda like the theme of my lifestyle. It's like yeah we got a

The BasedGod continues on page 12



Logan Wallace

Lil B's reflection in a puddle at the Cliff House in San Francisco.



Logan Wallace

'I'm ready to be a grandfather now. To settle and be around my kids'

***Street Spirits** from page 5*

ing programs at many points in his life, he can't really point to a moment where he became homeless, and he's still not sure the label really feels right for him.

"When I was younger, I never considered being homeless. I just considered me out here drifting and enjoying life," he said. "It's just that when you get older it turns homeless."

Plus, he feels like he'll never be homeless back in his hometown, Alton, because he knows plenty of people he could stay with while getting back on his feet. So going without a permanent roof over his head feels more like part of how things naturally go when he's travelling around without a lot of money.

> *'When I was younger... I just considered me out here drifting and enjoying life. When you get older it turns homeless'*

In his late 30s, Jones landed in Springfield, Illinois, for four years. There he met Rhonda Campbell. The two got together and they had three daughters, named Shonda, Kayla, and Ebony.

For a few years, the young family travelled. Jones had become a maintenance man, painter, and landscaper. So when they arrived in a new place, they would usually check into a motel, and Jones would go out and rustle up some clients. They lived together in Los Angeles for a while, then later moved to Oakland. But when Jones was in his early 40s, the couple broke up and went their separate ways, although Jones stayed in touch with Rhonda and the kids.

Jones was still living in the Bay Area about 12 years ago when he first discovered *Street Spirit*. At the time, he was staying in a homeless shelter and saw other people selling the papers, so he decided to give it a shot. By his account, he quickly became one of the best salespeople for the paper at the time.

Jones left Oakland to move to Omaha, Nebraska. That's where he first laid his eyes on Melody Biggs. Melody was sitting at a bus stop and she smiled at Jones as he walked by. Jones says there was an instant attraction between the two of them, so he just had to stop and ask for her number. Two months later, they got hitched.

"I thought I'd never get married," he said. "But I guess God showed me that I could, he was just waiting until I got 49 years old."

For over a decade, the couple travelled together, living in Omaha, St. Louis, and San Antonio, before coming out to the Bay Area last year.

"I enjoyed every moment with her, even the bad ones," Jones said.

But shortly after the couple arrived in California, Biggs's chronic kidney problems got worse. In October of 2019, she was admitted to Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Berkeley. She died two weeks later.

Jones said that his experience at the hospital was terrible. His wife was receiving dialysis, and he's worried that missteps in her treatment, and a failure to run additional tests as her condition worsened, could have contributed to her death. He also feels like the staff should have told them that she was at risk of passing away, because it came as a total surprise.

"If I knew my wife was going to die, I would have just stayed there all day and spent all that time with her," he said. Instead, he was spending his days trying to find them housing so they could have a place to stay when she was released.

Jones was in the room when Melody died. He said that when he told staff she passed away, they made him leave and a security guard escorted him away. Over a year later, Jones still isn't clear exactly what caused her death, and he said the hospital has been avoiding his questions.

"Won't nobody get with me to explain why my wife's heart stopped," he said.

Jones wants to file a formal complaint, but says he hasn't been able to because he doesn't have the expertise to go up against the hospital and can't afford to hire a lawyer.

"Our commitment to patient privacy, as well as legal requirements, prevent us from providing additional information" a Sutter Health spokesperson told *Street Spirit* in an email.

It's been a struggle since his wife passed. "I know I got to keep going on but when you lose somebody like that, that you so close with, like that, man, it just, it just pulls all your energy out," he said.



Noah Baustin

Jones carries his wife's ashes—pictured in the black box bearing her driver's license—around with him in his van wherever he goes.

"I don't think I'll ever love like that again, she made my whole world," Jones reflected. "I didn't care what troubles I got in, how homeless we were doing. We didn't care, we had one another."

After she died, Jones felt like he had to leave Berkeley because everywhere he turned, it reminded him of the time the two had spent together.

He went to Sacramento. When COVID-19 hit, he was able to participate in a city program that provided homeless people with motel rooms. He stayed there for 6 months. When the program expired at the end of November, he got in the car and moved back to the Berkeley area looking for a new place to stay.

When *Street Spirit* caught up with him in December, he had just spent his first night in a shared housing program called the Hayward Housing Navigation Center. He was able to get into the program soon after arriving back in town because he'd first connected with the program coordinator months ago, before he travelled north to Sacramento.

Through the program, Jones is tasked with finding housing on the rental market. After he finds an apartment, the Navigation Center helps pay for it. Having support from the Navigation Center makes Jones a solid housing candidate, as his rent is insured by the program. However, finding housing on the rental market is not easy. Recently, after finding what was supposed to be a private bedroom and securing the funding to pay for it, Jones says the landlord switched things up on him last minute, trying to convince him to share the room for the same cost he had agreed to pay for a single. Feeling frustrated and taken advantage of, Jones decided to continue looking for housing elsewhere. He is currently looking for housing again, and living in his car in the meantime.

As for work, Jones plans to continue selling *Street Spirit* and also pick up some landscaping clients.

"If your yard looks ugly, I could, on a budget, make it look like a three, or four, or even five-thousand-dollar yard when I get done with it," he said. His specialties include designing gardens with flowers and bricks. He is also a licensed painter who can work on both the interiors and exteriors of houses.

Jones wants to save up some money to get a place of his own, but he's not sure he wants to settle down in the Bay Area. The whole reason he came here after more than a decade away was to show his wife the area.

"She ain't here, and it ain't fun no more," he said. "My whole purpose for coming out here is gone."

Jones thinks he might be happier moving to Atlanta, where his daughter Shonda lives. One of his brothers also lives in Atlanta, and his daughter Kayla lives up the road in Kentucky. Another option could be Indianapolis, where his daughter Ebony is raising five of his nine grandkids. His four other grandkids live in his hometown, Alton, Illinois.

"I'm ready to be a grandfather now," he said. "To settle and be around my kids and start loving my grown daughters."

No matter what comes next, Jones hopes it can help him process the deep loss he experienced last year. Because right now, that's the main thing on his mind.

"I've got to get past grieving my wife," he said. "And that's going to take time."



Alastair Boone

Jones has attached his wife's engagement ring to his car keys so it's never far away.

Noah Baustin is a freelance journalist and audio producer based in Berkeley. He is also a student at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism where he is studying investigative reporting and audio production.



Thomas Brouns

Kata Ellsworth stands within the community garden she built.

Rain or shine, grassroots organizations distribute aid to unhoused

By Thomas Brouns

THE plan was to pair a bicycle race with the distribution of essential winter gear and food to Oakland area unhoused communities. Unfortunately, rainy weather put a damper on the cycling portion. But that didn't stop a handful of dedicated volunteers from spending a cold, wet day delivering as many of those supplies as they could—by car, rather than by bike.

This event, dubbed "the Giving Spirit," was the brainchild of The Village, a grassroots advocacy group in Oakland, and the Cardboard & Concrete unhoused artists collective—a group of unhoused artists from Berkeley and Oakland. The All Souls' Episcopal Parish in Berkeley, which regularly embarks on projects to support unhoused people, provided supplies and food. Members of the church and the East Bay community at large provided additional warm clothing and other donations. Volunteer events like this help fill the gaps that are left by local governments and official service providers, which are stretched too thin to cover the immense need that exists in the Bay Area's homeless community.

"Thank you from our hearts to all of the organizations and individuals that have so generously seen a great need and have been doing the action work to fill a great void," said an encampment resident named Kata Ellsworth, while volunteers distributed food and donations around her.

Needa Bee, who is herself unhoused and founded The Village in Oakland, oversees the provision of housing support and twice-weekly food deliveries to Oakland area homeless encampments. She explained why they wouldn't let the downpour cancel the event completely.

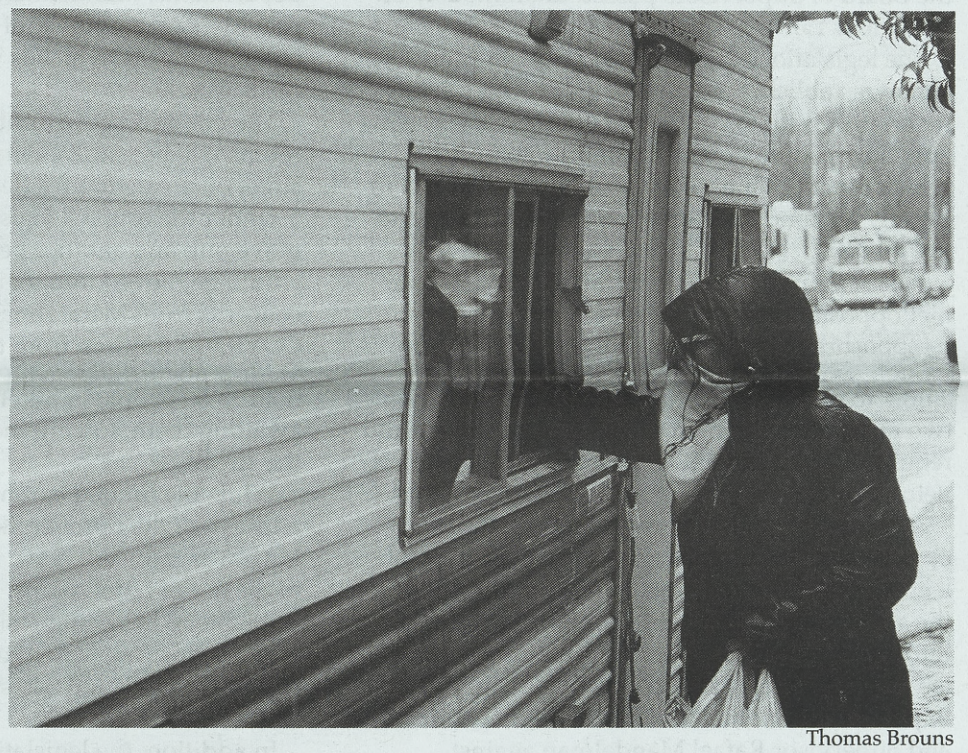
"Being unhoused, you're already in the elements. If anything, that's even more reason to bring people hot meals, because people are going to be cold and miserable out in the rain. The weather won't stop us from doing what needs to be done. That inconvenience is part of daily life," said Bee.

Multimedia journalist and Cardboard & Concrete Collective member Yesica Prado lives in her vehicle. One of the lead planners for the event, Prado said they intended for the bike event to take place two months ago, but it was postponed several times. When asked why a bike race rather than simply delivering goods by car, she offered two reasons.

"Many members of the Collective are bike couriers," she said. Unhoused people don't have addresses and delivering by bike courier is the only way you can deliver things directly to their hands, she explained. The bike couriers suggested bringing in outside people and turning it into a community event. "Anybody can ride a bike too, you know? So we wanted to invite anybody and anyone to do it," she said.

Berkeley's All Souls' Episcopal Parish has a long history of supporting the local unhoused community. When Bee and Prado arrived to pick up donations, Deacon Dani Gabriel showed them three discrete piles of supplies, specifically designated for three encampments. Rector Phil Brochard explained that they had first done a needs survey of the three encampments to find out what they needed, and then members of the church filled those needs. These included warm clothing and blankets, waterproof containers, tarps, toothbrushes and other hygiene items. By targeting the donations in this way, he said, "We don't end up with a lot of 'junk for Jesus.'"

At a Berkeley encampment, the volunteers were met by three additional church members. Jeff and Cathy Goshorn and their fellow parishioner, Pat, went from RV to RV handing out an entire SUV-load of jambalaya, packed in individual meal-size bags. Kata Ellsworth—who sometimes refers to herself as the "camp mama"—said, "Living without a home is very challenging, but it can be done with dignity and compassion, cleaning up after ourselves and having consideration for everyone, including surrounding businesses." Kata advocates for her encampment and maintains a space she calls "Harmony Garden" within the industrial area her community calls home. It includes a covered seating area and social space, surrounded by meticulously cared-for plants and flowers. She added, "To receive the amazing outreach that we have seen here in Berkeley brings hope and a feeling of being seen and valued. With that renewed hope comes a sense of compassion and unity….What you do touches lives and makes a difference!"



Thomas Brouns

Yesica Prado hands supplies to a person inside their RV.

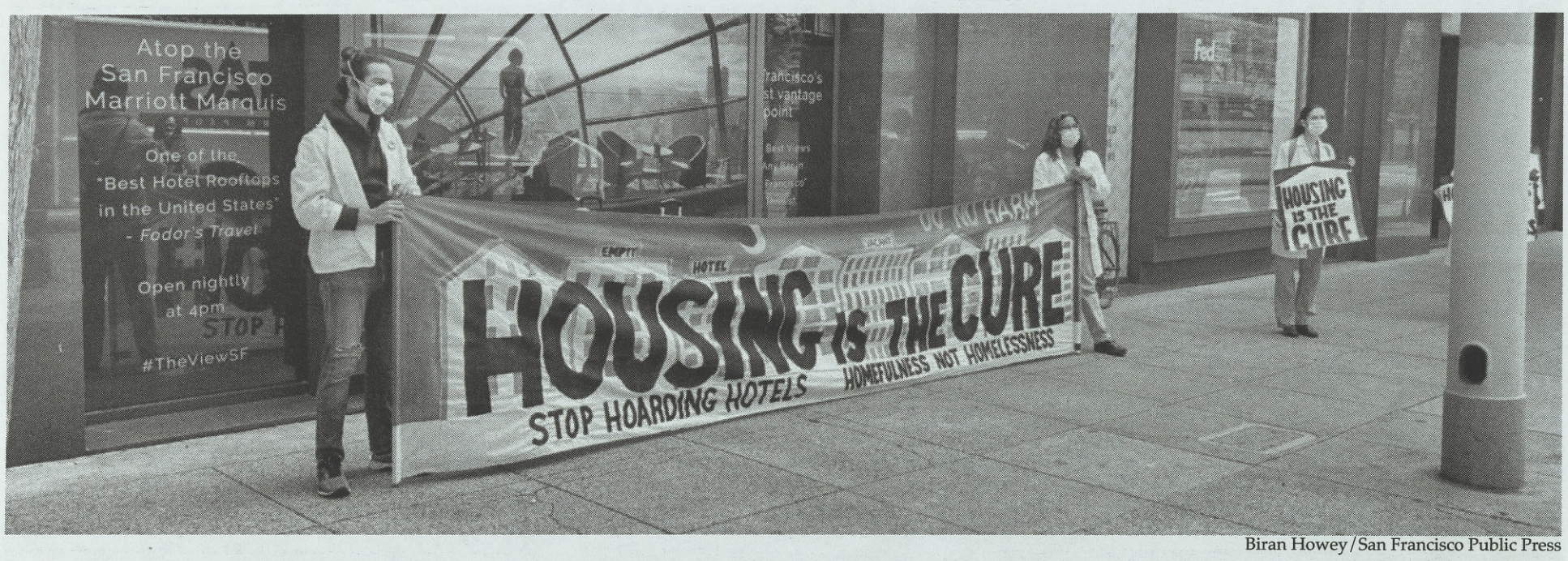
But the need is great. According to the January 2019 Point-in-Time Count, Oakland had an estimated 4,017 people living on the streets, in tents, or in vehicles—a 47 percent increase since 2017. Nearly two years after the most recent count, given the additional turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, homeless advocates believe there may be as many as 10,000 homeless people in Oakland, spread across at least 45 large encampments and dozens of smaller ones.

On any given day, grass-roots organizations and private citizens can be spotted handing out food or other donations on the periphery of many of these camps, especially as the weather turns colder. Bee acknowledged the "wonderful spirit of generosity around the holidays," but highlighted that the assistance given to homeless encampments on Thanksgiving and Christmas can lead to unexpected problems and asked that people be more mindful. "What people tend to do is drop off boxes of food and drive away. These donations often result in piles of boxes and trash after the holidays, which can bring in rats and roaches. This leads neighbors to complain about the trash they blame the unhoused for having created which, often then results in the city harassing unhoused folks, Bee said. That's in the best-case scenario, she added. "In the worst case scenario, [the encampments] get bulldozed."

There are ways that we can all contribute a little something, even if it's just time, said Prado. "If you don't have things, we always need volunteers, you know? So there's always a way to help," she said.

Bee said she hopes residents of the encampments see their actions as empowering. "Folks know that we're not helpless; that we actually can help each other. And I think it also helps change the stereotype, for housed folks to realize that we're not helpless."

Thomas Brouns is a documentary filmmaker and student at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism. He has served four overseas tours as an American diplomat and is a retired U.S. Army officer.



Biran Howey / San Francisco Public Press

Protesters from POOR magazine attempt to occupy the Marriott Marquis hotel in May, demand the city house more homeless residents in vacant hotel rooms.

San Francisco extends shelter-in-place hotel program

By Nuala Bashari

THE City of San Francisco will house more people in hotel rooms than it had planned thanks to a law the Board of Supervisors passed unanimously on December 15.

The legislation, drafted by Supervisor Matt Haney, establishes an emergency ordinance that requires the city to continue its practice of housing homeless people in hotel rooms while COVID-19 remains a risk. Emergency ordinances are used to rapidly respond to crises such as pandemics, and last 60 days.

It is a slimmed-down version of a bill that had met opposition in a committee. Haney and his co-sponsors—Supervisors Hillary Ronen, Dean Preston, and Shamann Walton—amended the legislation *to secure the eight votes it needed to pass*—two more than a non-emergency ordinance would require. That threshold also makes the legislation veto-proof.

Approximately 2,200 homeless people live in city-funded hotel rooms across the city. Under the legislation, new occupants would be moved in from the streets as current hotel residents are transitioned into housing. The Budget and Finance committee passed the legislation in early December, with Supervisors Walton and Sandra Lee Fewer in favor and Supervisor Rafael Mandelman against.

Getting all 11 supervisors on board was a last-minute effort.

"Over the last week, it did become clear that we did not have the supermajority that was required to pass this legislation as it was written," Haney said during the meeting. "We worked closely with departments, Mandelman, and homeless service providers on a number of amendments to address cost specifically, which is where most of the concerns were."

The bill now sets a limit on how many hotel rooms will be made available to those living on the street once existing residents move out.

Under the original legislation, one resident would move out, and another person from the street would be moved into their hotel room. That raised concerns from Mandelman that when emergency COVID-19 funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency ran out, there would be more *than 2,000 people in hotel rooms with no housing* awaiting them, forcing the city to send them back to the streets.

While the limited exit housing wasn't directly addressed, the number likely to be affected by that issue was reduced. Now, for every 10 people that move out of hotel rooms, six rooms will be made available to incoming residents. For the first round of hotel closures, slated for early 2021, 567 rooms will be vacated, and 340 subsequently filled with new residents.

In addition, the legislation doesn't mandate that new residents occupy the just-vacated rooms. This allows the city to potentially consolidate residents into a smaller number of shelter-in-place hotels, negotiate new contracts with service providers operating the hotels, and free up rooms for those isolating or quarantining with COVID-19.

Finally, the legislation was amended to specify that the commitment the city made to house its existing hotel residents after they exit from shelter-in-place hotels need not apply to new residents. That would enable the city to send people back to the street when the program ends.

"I suggested to Supervisor Haney that we not go right up until the moment the FEMA funding is cut off, with 2,000 folks in the hotel rooms in the fall of 2021," Mandelman said, before voting for the amended legislation. "Unless we're going to take that on as a locally funded program, we need to gradually downsize."

The emergency ordinance goes into effect as soon as Mayor London Breed signs off on it, which must happen within 10 days. The ordinance lasts 60 days, at which point it can be extended. In the meantime, people are beginning to move out of hotels into permanent supportive housing, creating vacancies that can now be filled.

This article originally appeared in the San Francisco Public Press. Nuala Bashari is a staff writer for the San Francisco Public Press. She is an award-winning journalist based in San Francisco.

'Justice must be extended to us all, or none of us have justice'

***Memorials** from page 4*

Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS), said at the Berkeley memorial. "We cannot just stand by and continue to watch what goes on year after year. This is not the first memorial for our brothers and sisters who have died. We have done this every year for over 30 years. Why are all of you so quiet? Why are you not joining voices with the unhoused, their advocates?"

The demands discussed at the zoom services included housing for all, charging stations across the city, regular trash pickup, better maintenance for porta-potties and sanitation stations, more showers, and warming stations, amongst other things. Speakers called attention to where city governments have fallen short, failing to keep promises they have made in the past, such as creating sanctioned homeless encampments and providing permits to those who live in vehicles.

"Housing should not be based on your ability to make a certain amount of income… it should not depend on the well-being of your mind, body, or soul," Pastor Mike McBride of The Way Christian Center said at the BCSC service. "Justice must be extended to us all, or none of us have justice."

Both services took the time to name the unhoused people and thier advocates who are known to have died in 2020. In Berkeley, Lisa Teague and Russell Bates read out a list of names from People's Park. Those individuals were Eddy Serafino, Attila Zagyi, Clark Sullivan, Robin McCoy Glover, Fixie, Frankie Bonner, "Uncle Mike" Smith, Gunnar Brekke, Gunner Brack, Michael Diehl, Herbert Roberts, Jason Clary, Mike Lee, Jupiter Marley, Mike Zint, Margy Wilkinson, Maria Guevera, William Stevens, and Arthur Roper.

Teague and Bates often had to pause to compose themselves. "We love these people," Teague said during one tearful pause.

At the St. Mary's Center service, Castillo read a list of names as well, honoring those who are known to have died the street. These individuals were 300, Avin Looney, Adrea Fritz, Angel, Antwon, Attila Zagyi, Big Mike, Brandon "Twin" e12, Brenda Daily, Carl, Carolyn L., Clarence Walker, Clark Sullivan, Claudette Smith, Cody Runningbull, Craig Fleming, Cyndy H., Darhyl Rivers, David Anthony Johnson, Didi, Elton R., Frank Carter, Frankie Bonner, George, Gunnar Brekke, Gunner Brack, Herbert Roberts, Jacqueline B., James Leone, Janet C., Jason Clary, Jerome S., John F., Jose, Joseph Pleasant, Kendrick, Kim Coleman, Latosha, Leroy, Linda Adams, Lysa Chaney, Marcus, Margaret C., Margy Wilkinson, Maria Guevera, Mark Sparks, Marsha Hill, Mathis Ward, Jr., Mayesha, Michael "Sleepy" Comeraux, Michael Dowdy, Michael Killingbeck, Michael Smith, Michael Zint, Miguel, Mike (High Street), Mike Lee, Mitchal Gillespie, Ms. Deidra (High Street), Ms. Donna (High street), Ms. Pat (Smart & Final), Mumbles (youth), Natasha Rogers, Oscar P., Oscar Young, Patricia C., Quintin Pierce, Ralph McFerren, Regina Davis, Roy Smith, Ruben C., Ruben V., Sam "Ham" Helms, Shawn (45th Street), Spanky, Street, Sunshine, Tyrone, Uncle Mike, Vernon Andrew, William Stevens, Williams Burroughs, Yoyo, Rufus Wainwright, and Bishop Emery.

The St. Mary's Center memorial was hosted in honor of Mike Lee, a long-time East Bay homeless activist who died in August.

"It is an indictment that in one of the wealthiest cities and regions in the world, that we have not figured out a way to leverage our tax dollars to house our brothers and sisters," said McBride. "This is not a lack of charity or generosity… it is because of a lack of policy and a systemic failure of epic proportions in one of the most self-proclaimed liberal cities in the world. May we look in the mirror and repent."

Alastair Boone is the Editor in Chief of Street Spirit.

'I would rather go behind a bush'

***Porta-potties** from page 3*

With two paid employees, more porta-potties are routinely checked but there are still gaps. The Health and Human Services Department is also in charge of other services such as food distribution, which can take time away from routine site inspection, says a staff worker at the Human Services Department.

If city workers find a site is not being serviced, they reach out to the vendor as well as the community to determine what is causing the issue.

When asked if The Village in Oakland has this problem, Founder Needa Bee said sometimes—but at the end of the day it comes down to communication. "Part of the deal is, as the service provider paying for it, having good communication with the residents using the porta-potty and the porta-potty company." Bee says a common problem they face is running out of toilet paper, so she spends time on the phone with the providers ensuring that more will be delivered. She also says that many of the porta-potties paid for by The Village have locks. She gives the key to encampment residents, who are charged with holding each other accountable for keeping things clean.

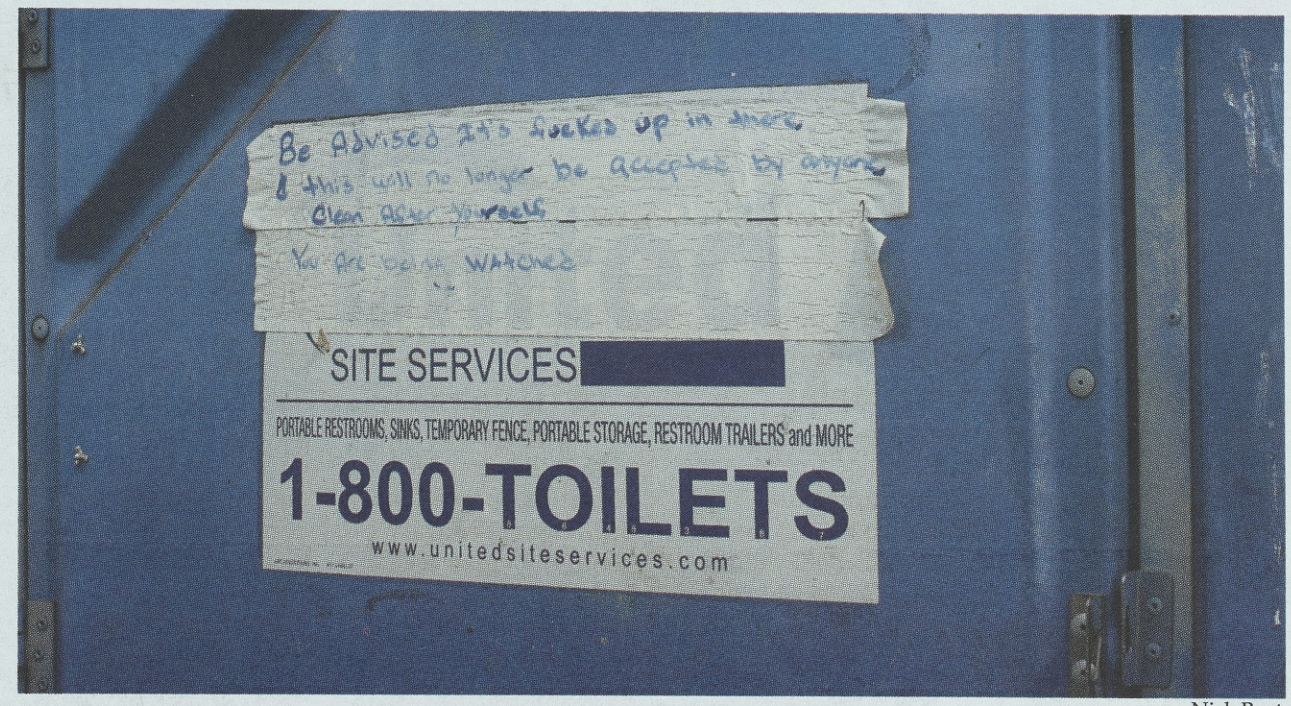
Shorty, an unhoused person living under the West Oakland BART Station, says he sees a United Worker come to service the nearby sanitation station by twice a week. Whether they service and clean the facility is another question.

"I spend 20 to 30 hours a week sweeping the street around the porta-potties," said Shorty, who has been living curbside on and off for the past three years. "But people who don't live here come in and leave [the bathrooms] dirty."

Derek Suu, the community leader at the 77th Rangers in East Oakland, has had mostly positive interactions with United Services without having to use keys.

"The porta-potties are serviced every two days and we make sure to keep them clean," Suu said.

The 77th Rangers currently have around 10 residents but have had up 60 in previous years. And according to the new Encampment Management Policy, their camp will be allowed to remain in place. However, some of the encampments at which the city currently provides porta-potty services are on the chopping block come January 1. It is not clear whether these toilets will remain in place or be removed as the new policy is enforced.



Nick Burt

A hand-written note on an Oakland porta-potty warns toilet users to keep the shared area clean.

Nevertheless, not all of the city-sanctioned porta-potties are located at organized communities. Some are placed at random intersections, blocks away from large gathering points for the homeless.

For the unsheltered people who live far away from the nearest porta-potty—or who live near one that has not been serviced for months—the only remaining option is to relieve themselves in public space, amongst foliage or behind buildings.

"I refuse to use those bathrooms," James Bixter, known as Monster, said.

Bixter and Baby Girl, his eight-year-old dog, have called the underpass below Berkeley's University Avenue home for over five years now. The encampment, known colloquially as Seabreeze, encompasses both the underpass to the east and the large offramp on the west side of the freeway.

While the encampment hosts over 50 people at any time, the City of Berkeley has never placed a porta-potty or handwashing station there. Instead, local non-profits like the Berkeley Free Clinic have fulfilled this need by supplying the area with handmade washing stations. Even then, Bixter is cautious about using the facilities.

"I rather go behind a bush…the bathrooms never seem to have toilet paper and there is never any hand sanitizer at the sink," Bixter said.

At Point Isabel in Richmond, conditions are similar—the on-site porta-potties have not been serviced since September. Issues include a constant lack of toilet paper, little if any soap in the dispenser, and no running water.

"The bathrooms are so bad we walk to the end of the street where the park bathrooms are always open and clean," Brenda Navarro said.

Navarro, who lives with her husband Hector, has been living out of their Honda Minivan at Point Isabel in Richmond for the past year. Originally used as a rest-point for truckers, the one-way road parallel to the San Francisco Bike Trail has exploded with homeless community members in the past six months.

"There used to be four RV campers parked along the road, now there are over 30 and only two porta-potties for everyone," Navarro said.

Many community members including Brenda now frequent the East Bay Regional Park bathrooms located at the end of the street.

With the help of local non-profits, Brenda and other community members are trying to change that through weekly Friday meetings. But making any coordinated change is an uphill battle, due to over half of the community not attending meetings and strong opposition from local businesses located across the street.

"We want to have our own bathrooms so we can keep ourselves clean," Navarro said. "We look like this because we don't have access… it's not fair."

---

*Nick Burt is a graduating Senior at UC Berkeley. His thesis, Where Do We Go Now?, documented unequal access to sanitation services for the unhoused during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instagram: @_nickburt_*

'People have been subjected to a system that, frankly, can be changed'

***Book** from page 2*

arate things, and largely are, but to me they were entwined within some of the same systems—Trump's career as a blowhard real estate mogul who spent his career seeking ways to raise property values, often by kicking out poor minorities; the lack of artistic, "free" spaces left in the Bay due to landlords raising their property values by converting to lofts left Ghost Ship as one of the few gathering places left.

Beyond those, I've been reporting on homeless evictions—for publications, or just for Twitter sometimes—and simply living in the ether or friends having to move out of town because they can't afford it. Once I figured out I wanted to write about the effects of the commodification of property, I wanted to trick people into reading it, hence, the noir plot.

AB: Your book really grounds the reader in Oakland. Oftentimes, it grounds the reader in Oakland's homeless encampments. How come Oakland's encampments are so central to the geography of Eastern Span?

RP: As far as I can tell, it's all interconnected. The system that's pushed artists into underground spaces and squats is the same one that's evicted (often minority) low-income tenants from their homes is the same one that answers the complaints of property owners by evicting mutual-aid encampments without giving them anywhere else to go. The encampments, particularly "Here/There," are so out in the open that I felt it'd give the reader, presumably local, more grounding to know where the action was taking place.

AB: What do you hope readers will take away from your novel about Oakland? What do you hope they will take away about homelessness in Oakland?

RP: I want readers in Oakland (and the Bay, and all over the country really), to become more interested in their own local city. So much of the media now is dominated by whatever New York determines is "news," or by Trump just sucking up all of the bandwidth, that people tend to overlook what's happening in their own damned backyard now. If I could get one person to shift their funds away from supporting the New York Times to supporting a local journalist or independent enterprise in the Bay, that'd be a big win for me.

In terms of homelessness, I want the housed to break down their self-imposed barrier when it comes to seeing the houseless. This sense that people so often walk past other people without any kind of acknowledgement, as if living on two planes of existence. A fictional book by some random dude isn't going to erect the supply of public housing that's needed to break this cycle, but maybe it can get some folks to see homeless folks as, you know, people. People that haven't just been lazy, or didn't work hard enough, or are weak because they've allowed a drug addiction to take over. But people that have been subjected to a system that, frankly, can be changed. I suppose that would be my hope.

A version of this article originally appeared in the July, 2019 issue of Street Spirit. Alastair Boone is the Editor in Chief of Street Spirit.

Wear the poem if it fits

By Claire J. Baker

To you, who say you are only
a grain of sand, lost,
lonely on the city shore,
I wish the ocean's salted scent
and roar...when caught in caves
where shadows hide, I wish you
push and pull of tide, sun
ruling in on a wave,
washing your image bright
and brave.



Oakland, CA— City opens permanent affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness

COVID-19 relief funds from Governor Gavin Newsom's "Project Homekey" have helped the City of Oakland purchase permanent affordable housing. These purchases, under the banner Project Reclamation, have cost a cumulative $10 million, *KPIX* reports.

The City of Oakland has purchased a former college dorm—Clifton Hall in Rockridge—for permanent housing for families and seniors, *KRON 4* reports. Additionally, the City has purchased 17 single family homes with Project Homekey funds, which will be converted into shared housing for people experiencing homelessness, KPIX reports.

100 people will be moved into the 17 single family homes, which will be operated by Bay Area Community Services (BACS). Tenants will pay some rent, but will be supported by BACS with rental assistance. The homes will be shared, with individuals getting private rooms but sharing other facilities.

West Palm Beach, FL— New law criminalizes homeless behavior that disrupts the city's "aesthetic beauty"

In December, West Palm Beach commissioners unanimously voted to pass a new ordinance that prohibits panhandling in certain areas, making the act punishable by a fine of up to $500 or 60 days of jail time, the *Miami New Times* reports. The original language of the ordinance also banned sleeping in public, though that clause was removed before the law was approved.

The city's agenda explains that the measure "regulates and prohibits certain conduct that would negatively affect the aesthetic beauty and the health, sanitation, and public safety of the City's Downtown and Northwood Areas."

San Francisco, CA—LGBTQ homeless youth have a place to call home for the holidays

San Francisco's LGBTQ center is finding homeless youth a home for the holidays, *ABC 7* reports.

It's run by a "Host Home" program financed by federal Housing and Urban Development funds. The nationally-recognized program aims to find volunteers to house homeless LGBTQ youth ages 18 to 24 for a period of three months to one year. Through this program, the San Francisco LGBTQ center helps pair youth with families who can provide extra space in their home.

According to the San Francisco 2019 Youth Homeless Count and Survey, 46 percent of youth experiencing homelessness in the city identify as LGBTQ.

Denver, CO—City is sued by advocates for raiding Homeless camps

Unhoused people are joining with advocates to sue the City of Denver in federal court for its raids on outdoor encampments, *Filter* magazine reports. The plaintiffs alleged the city is violating homeless people's rights by breaking up their shelter and seizing their belongings without notice. The city responded by claiming the raids are necessary to protect the public from disease—despite the fact that these encampment evictions contradict COVID-19 guidelines from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Homeless advocate organization Denver Homeless Out Loud and a group of homeless Denver residents filed the suit in the US District Court of Colorado, which first heard evidence on December 15. The plaintiffs claimed that raids on outdoor homeless encampments violate people's constitutional rights to due process.

'We're all sharing this earth'

***The BasedGod** from page 7*

club but you're welcome. Yeah I'm in a club but you're welcome in it too.

AB: I noticed that you have a couple music videos that include homeless people. I'm thinking specifically about the video for "Giving Up" where you're panhandling and you've got some unsheltered folks in the background behind you. What made you decide to do that? And those are real people, not actors, yeah?

LB: Yeah yeah. [They are real people.] Bringing people closer to my environment in Berkeley, letting people see what's going on. And to let folks know like, just as easy I could be one of those folks. It's just like that. Just getting the chance to experience you know, having a sign up and panhandling. It was nice actually seeing some people give me some money. [And other] people just ridin' by. So you see the beautiful part of humans, and that was a beautiful time for me to do that video and just experience that for a little while, not fully, but just to experience that for a little while. Just to let people know that I could be there too.

Just reminding people, we here. Homeless people on the street, I don't feel no different. I don't feel no different from them because we're human, no matter what color, no matter any of that.

I been honored to collaborate with *Street Spirit* and support y'all, and we finally got to this place where I could be one of those vendors, you know. When this is out, people are gon' see me on the street standing in solidarity with all my human family that's out there, either vendors or even just people that read it, read it and support it.

AB: To me it feels more like homelessness—what's going on on the street—impacts the culture in the Bay Area. How do you think the culture of people who live on the street impact everyone? How does it impact the whole culture of the Bay Area?

LB: It's perspective, you know. It's perspective. I think that those that represent that culture and that experience...they have a whole different perspective that deserves to be understood and supported. It's all perspective, being able to bring that in and share it. And you know I'm down with it all, besides the fires which happen to even people that are not homeless on the streets. Fires happen, people make mistakes you know but it's perspective. I think that's what they bring.

AB: Right, that's a great point. Especially now with all the wealth disparity in the Bay.

LB: It shows human life and it reminds people, this isn't yours. Regardless of how much land you got or how much money in the bank account or what is passed down, or what you don't have, or what you rent, we're all sharing this earth. Somebody could be asleep right on the corner and you gotta respect it. We sharin' it. And if that corner Is filled up with people to the point that you can't walk, that's just what it is. That's earth, that's life, that's what's going on down here. I mean hopefully the wheelchair people can find a way, but you know it is what it is.

AB: Anything else on your mind before we wrap up?

LB: This is only the beginning. This isn't the last time. I appreciate the historical essence and the legacy that you guys are keeping continued and it's a blessing so congratulations for another paper because we can't forget that's American… That's the history, that's the culture.

Lil B music, lifestyle, [there's] a lot more in store. Just know I'm coming, and I'm just taking my time and it's coming from an authentic place. I don't force anything, I let things happen when it should and when it's supposed to. I'm just thinking about all y'all. I'm focused on how I can help more than music. Just know that we here. God bless.

Uncut version of this interview soon to available online: thestreetspirit.org.



Logan Wallace

Lil B at the Sutro Baths in San Francisco.

In Dialogue is a feature in which Street Spirit *speaks with community leaders. Alastair Boone is the Editor in Chief of Street Spirit. Elias Domingo is a 23-year-old San Francisco native and Bay Area enthusiast. Charlie Boone contributed reporting. (All three love Lil B!) Photos by Logan Wallace (Instagram: @brodielo. Web: loganwallace.co/).*

Is there a holiday custom for someone who spent 16 years in prison?

***Holiday** from page 4*

Everyday I am reminded of my life inside. Should I take off and go to Vegas to relive my childhood and find some meaning there? Should I cook a meal "prison style" just to reminisce? Happiness and the holidays are supposed to be synonymous right?

It's hard to be happy (is anyone happy in these times?), so I choose this season to focus on giving thanks.

I'm thankful for not having to worry about them running out of turkey or shoving it inside of me in ten minutes in case the guard tells me to leave, so others can sit down. I'm thankful not to have to sit on a metal seat.

I'm also grateful to everyone, who thought I could come back out to society and have a second chance at life. I thank my fellow citizens for realizing the mistake of the last four years.

Thanks also to those who continue to fight for the underdog. Thanks to those who believe that you shouldn't get pulled over just because you are born a certain color. Thanks to those in uniform, who actually believe in peace and not abusing the law. Thanks to those who save life every day, the doctors and nurses who risk their lives and go to work leaving their loved ones behind.

Thanks to those inside and their families outside who have to endure the separation of not seeing each other.

I also choose to give to those who are not as fortunate as me, those who are incarcerated, locked up physically and inside their minds.

This holiday season, I feel as uncertain as I did on my first holiday inside. I don't know what my life will be like, what traditions will be in my future, and who and what I am leaving behind.

Vegas is only six hours away (pending parole approval).

Jonathan Chiu is a formerly incarcerated citizen who paroled from San Quentin State Prison on May 1, 2020. He has been part of the San Quentin News since 2015 as the layout designer and crossword designer for both the newspaper and San Quentin's Wall City magazine.